

Written Testimony of Danielle Shimotakahara to the members of the United States Senate Commerce Committee on Science and Transportation on March 21, 2000.

My name is Danielle Shimotakahara and I am 12 years old.

On the day of the Columbine massacre in April of 1999, I came home from school and told my Mom about the graphically violent video games that are at pizza parlors, bowling alleys, skating rinks and other places where kids hang out. I told her that I didn't think that little kids should be playing them. I asked her what we could do to get rid of them. I felt that a petition signed by kids might influence businesses to remove or replace them with nonviolent ones. I designed a petition to get rid of violent video games in places where children hang out. I brought my Mom to see these games, because she had never seen them. She was shocked. She helped me with the design for a petition. She helped me do research about violence in the media and in electronic games. I made a bibliography and I put it with the petition.

I think these types of games are disgusting. Kids as young as three years old can use mounted guns to shoot people to pieces and watch blood splatter on the screen. Kids get points for killing people. Parents eat pizza while their kids blow somebody up. I have friends who play them. Their eyes look crazy when they play them and they get excited when the blood splatters and parts of bodies fly in pieces. On some machines, they can make choices about which type of gun to use. I think it teaches kids bad things. Some older kids can get bad ideas from it, and little kids can have nightmares. I think it is important to keep these types of killer coin-operated video machines away from the eyes and hands of children. I don't think these games are entertainment. I don't think it is entertaining for a kid to eat pizza or a hot dog and watch a person kill somebody on a gaming machine. These machines are almost everywhere that kids go. I think it is important to especially keep little kids away from them, because they don't know whether they are real or not real. Little kids still believe in Santa Claus. Psychological research says that children under the age of seven do not know the difference between fantasy and reality.

I think it gives a message to older kids that it is O.K. to kill people. The killer is the hero, even if he is killing policemen. Kids identify with the hero. Kids play them so many times that they become desensitized to seeing blood or bodies exploding. The more people that they explode, the more blood splattering, they see in some games. They are also learning conditioning when they shoot guns at people and get points for it. I think it is sad that they are laughing while they are doing it. The boy who did the killing in Arkansas a few years ago learned to shoot a gun by playing these types of games. He had excellent marksmanship. I think that it teaches some kids to be violent, and I think a few of those kids will think about acting out that violence on innocent people. Others actually might be influenced to do it. I think it is the same as selling alcohol, drugs, pornography, or tobacco to kids.

These video machines are similar to the ones that are used to train police officers and the military. Parents are not always with older kids to see what they are playing so a lot of parents don't know, and I think they need to know. I became even more inspired later in May when I read that Disney removed its violent video games from its arcades and my mother saved that article to show to people. I think everyone needs to be educated on the potentially harmful effects of these machines on kids. Little kids get nightmares from playing these games. I had an educational table at a Children's Health Carnival on March 10. One kid

who was probably eight or nine says he likes playing these games, but he also said he got nightmares from them.

Violent blood splattering gun mounted coin operated video games are almost everywhere young children go. I feel these machines are a bad influence on young children. Children climb onto chairs or get up on footstools to use them at pizza parlors, skating rinks, movie theaters. Mom and I watched a three year old girl splattering blood on one of these machines at a pizza parlor while the babysitter helped her balance on the footstool. She was holding a mounted gun, and when she missed, the mother hollered from the table, "Aim higher next time." I told my Mom that the babysitter should be fired and she said, "I think the parent should be fired." We talked to the Mom about how dangerous it is to expose little kids to this violence and I think she understands, now.

I want people to learn and think about these machines. I know that a lot of parents didn't even know that these types of games were being played by their kids until I started this petition. Parents don't go in the game room at pizza parlors. They just give out the quarters and eat their pizza with other parents. Every parent should go in the game room and check out what games are there. It makes you feel sick just to watch them. I get cards and letters and phone calls from parents telling me that they threw out violent software video games when they heard about my petition.

The petition is not a valid petition because it contains the names of both children and adults. Some are five years old. They can hardly print. They print in very large letters. Their big printing makes an even bigger statement. I believe that this is our voice as children. There are 3000-4000 signatures on the petition and people and kids are still signing it. We are young and we can't vote but we can express our opinions in this way.

I discovered that a lot of kids that I thought were playing these games were surprisingly not playing them. One of those was a boy in my school, Jack Rabin, who later helped me do a presentation to a City Council meeting. I definitely learned not to judge people by what I had heard about them from others. You have to meet and talk with them, yourself. I realized that it is easier to prevent younger kids from playing these machines than it is teenagers, because teenagers have been playing them for a long time. I determined that parents have to be involved in what their kids are doing, and that kids need to have limits, even though we sometimes disagree.

The project is going to continue for a long time, because it is really hard to convince some people about the dangers. Some won't even listen. Some parents don't think it is harmful for a child to make blood splatter and body parts explode. I don't understand why they think it is OK to do this killing. It takes a lot of time to make a change and I discovered that some people can be very stubborn and refuse to listen when they are making a lot of money from something, even if that something is not a good thing. I learned that wording is important on a petition. The petition states, "we are voluntarily asking businesses to remove these machines." Until a law is passed, a business needs to make its own decision.

Teresa Sherwood the owner of Dave's Pizza in North Bend, Oregon said that she was having trouble getting the business that she leased her violent machine from to come and take it away. She said, "I had

to be persistent to get nonviolent ones. He said that he only had a few nonviolent ones and they were in other places.” She said, “After your petition came around, I got pushy. I told him my patience was gone, and to come and get it. It sat there for a month unplugged, before he came for it.” She said that she has not noticed any change in the amount of business that she gets since she took out the violent ones, and there are still lots of kids there. She said, “The kids love the new basketball one. They go crazy over it.” Some business owners told me that they would lose money if they took them out, but her story proves otherwise.

More parents now pay attention to the video games that their kids play. Some businesses moved them to an adult area or turned them off. One business said that he would not renew the lease for his machine. I think that all of society will benefit and the world will be a better place when these machines are not in places where kids go to eat and play.

Some of these machines include Area 51 with two mounted guns, all the Mortal Kombat machines where they use their fists to make body parts splatter, Police Trainer where they use sniper rifles and two mounted guns and look through a scope, Carnevil that uses two mounted shotguns, Silent Scope where they use mounted sniper guns and sneak up on ordinary people and shoot them for no reason. I think that it would be a good idea for Senators to go to a place like an arcade or a pizza parlor, etc. and try out these machines so you know what they do. If you feel too embarrassed to go by yourself, offer to bring your teenager or a close friend's son or daughter to play or watch a violent video blood splatterer. You will see first hand what it is all about.

The project is still ongoing and I still have more educating to do. With the help of many organizations, I have been working with the Southwestern Oregon Medical Society Alliance to raise more than \$8000 to bring an internationally recognized speaker to the area to speak on this issue on April 24, 25, and 26. I will be appearing with this speaker as he does presentations at seven middle schools. He will also speak at parent, student, mental health professional, and police groups, and for the general public. The speaker will be Lt. Col. David Grossman, an expert on TV, movie and video game violence. I will answer questions on a radio call in show with him as well.

I took my petition to the Oregon State Senate where 29 out of 30 Oregon State Senators signed it. Senator Veral Tarno invited me to the Senate, where I spoke to the Judiciary Committee. I presented the petition to city councils, churches and civic officials. Resolutions were written and passed as a result. The Oregon-Idaho Conference of United Methodist Churches passed two resolutions and one will go to the National Conference in Cleveland in June. Coos Bay passed Resolution 99-18. OR State Senator Veral Tarno is presently working on a draft for legislation regarding violent video gaming machines.

My project involves other activities-an educational play on video game violence that I am going to work on with my church youth group, lapel buttons, and a Cool-No-Violence window/door sticker that I designed for businesses that do not allow children access to these types of machines. This sticker is like the No Smoking sticker except it has a violent video game image on it and a slash across it with the words, Cool-No-Violence and C-NO-V on it. I designed it and Fran Holland, who is a local graphic artist further developed it on her computer. I had a donation for a few tee-shirt transfers for the Cool-No-Violence

logo. I gave one to Bishop Paup at the church conference where there were more than 900 delegates. I read a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. about peaceful means to achieve peaceful ends. I have no more Tee-shirts but I will pay for the other materials by putting my clothing on consignment. A local business, concerned with the health of children, may sponsor the making of Tee-shirts that have this logo on them.

The local newspaper in Coos Bay called The World, has been covering this peace project on the front page and a recent editorial discussed it. Education Week and Guideposts for Kids also interviewed me for an article. The Oregonian newspaper will have an article on it today, March 21.

I just received the Prudential Spirit of the Community Award as the top Oregon Middle School Volunteer for 2000. My project was chosen from 20,000 applications and I get to come back to Washington, D.C., where I will meet 103 other honorees and participate in national recognition events in May for four days. One event will be a Congressional breakfast. I just found out my project has also been selected as a finalist for another award chosen from 100,000 applications from 99 countries.

It is a controversial issue. I have been called names. Some business owners got very angry. They said that they make money from these machines and they don't want to lose money. It is not an easy project. It is really hard to do this, but I think it is important and maybe there will be fewer kids thinking that they should kill somebody. I would tell other young people that it was a really good thing to do and if you feel something needs to be changed to make society safer and better, you can do it. It is a lot of hard work but it pays off. Don't think just because you are young, people won't listen to you. I discovered that adults do respect us as kids.

I strongly feel that young children should not be exposed to these types of games and that if a business wants to have them, they should put them in an area of their business that restricts access by young children to playing them as well as seeing someone else play them.